



## **POLICY ON STAFF MENTAL HEALTH**

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<b>Division/Unit/Department</b>	Human Resources Division
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## 1. PREAMBLE

The University of Johannesburg (UJ) strives to support and enhance wellness by emphasizing the healthy holistic growth and development of staff through cooperative involvement of the campus community. The University understands that mental health is equally as important as physical health and that it could impact on the productivity, happiness and behaviour of employees. UJ is committed to ensuring that their workforce is productive, healthy and happy.

## 2. PURPOSE

In an effort to support and develop staff to achieve their mental health and to direct UJ's commitment to enhance staff mental health and wellness, this policy promotes compliance with relevant constitutional, legislative and policy directives.

The purpose of this policy is for UJ to establish, promote and maintain the mental health and wellbeing of all staff through workplace practices, and encourage staff to take responsibility for their own mental health and wellbeing. UJ further believes that the mental health and wellbeing of the staff is key to the success and sustainability of the institution.

The objectives of the mental health policy are the following:

- a) To build and maintain a workplace environment and culture that supports mental health and wellbeing and prevents discrimination (including bullying and harassment).
- b) To increase employee knowledge and awareness of mental health and wellbeing issues and behaviour.
- c) To reduce the stigma around depression and anxiety in the workplace.
- d) To facilitate employees' active participation in a range of initiatives that support mental health and wellbeing.

## 3. SCOPE

The policy is applicable to all employees of the University.

## 4. DEFINITION OF TERMS

**4.1 Staff:** All officers and employees of the University, persons acting in an honorary or voluntary capacity for or at the University.

**4.2 Disabilities:** The World Health Organisation (WHO) describes disabilities as an umbrella term, covering impairments, activity limitations, and participation restrictions. An "impairment" is further defined as a problem in bodily function or structure, while an "activity limitation" is a difficulty encountered by an individual in executing a task or action, and a "participation restriction" is a problem experienced by an individual in involvement in life situations. Thus, disability is a complex phenomenon, reflecting an interaction between features of a person's body and features of the society in which he or she lives.

**4.3 Mental Disorders:** The WHO states that mental disorders comprise a broad range of problems, with different and varying symptoms. However, they are generally characterized by some combination of abnormal thoughts, emotions, behaviour and relationships with others. Examples are schizophrenia,

depression, intellectual disabilities and disorders due to substance abuse and acute psychosis.

- 4.4 Mental Health:** The WHO defines Mental Health as a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community. The positive dimension of mental health is stressed in WHO's definition of health as contained in its constitution: "Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity."
- 4.5 Mental Health in the workplace:** The University's customised program to address mental health challenges experienced by employees through proactive interventions, reactive interventions and health promotion and engagement.
- 4.6 Reasonable accommodation:** Reasonable accommodation means any modification or adjustment to the environment that ensures persons with disabilities the enjoyment or exercise on an equal basis with others of all human rights and fundamental. Within the workplace reasonable accommodation refers to 'any measure that can ensure the entry and/or advancement of people with disabilities in the workplace'. Accommodations vary according to the disability and are determined on a case-by-case basis and must be 'reasonable' within the particular circumstances.

## **5. POLICY PRINCIPLES**

The University recognises that mental health issues could also have an effect on the institution and result in high turnover, increased absenteeism, a decline in employee productivity, work-related accidents, workplace violence or harassment and substance abuse by employees. The following principles underlie the mental health policy:

- a) **Non-discriminatory environment:** The University is aware that people living with mental health difficulties often face discrimination in all aspects of life. The University undertakes to create a supportive and non-discriminatory environment for employees living with mental health challenges and mental illness.
- b) **Equality:** The University is committed to the promotion of equality between individuals who are living with mental health related matters and those who are not. Employees living with mental illness will have the same rights and responsibilities as other employees.
- c) **Confidentiality:** All employee-disclosed medical information shall be kept confidential and shall only be released to a named third party in the following exceptional circumstances:
- i) Employees provide written consent to disclose information,
  - ii) The law requires disclosure; or,
  - iii) It is believed that there is a threat to a person's life or safety, and that failure to disclose this information will lead to harm.
- d) **Job Performance:** Participation in the Program does not relieve the employee of the responsibility of meeting acceptable work performance and attendance requirements. An employee's performance will be evaluated and dealt with in line with the University's performance management procedures regardless of whether the employee is making use of the support of the Mental Health Program.

- e) **Voluntary Basis:** Use of the Program is voluntary, even if the employee is referred by management. No manager, supervisor, or other person may overtly or covertly coerce or pressure an individual to make use of the service.
- f) **Job Security:** The decision to seek or accept assistance for mental health related matters will not negatively affect an employee's job security or advancement opportunities. If an employee is not able to perform any function because of a mental health condition then the standard benefits, conditions and procedures for ill health incapacity shall apply.

## 6. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

This policy encourages a collaborative approach with shared responsibility between the University and its staff, with respect to addressing staff mental health issues. The responsibilities of each stakeholder are described below:

### 6.1 The University

- a) While UJ is committed to creating a supporting environment, there are limits to the extent of its support. It is not the responsibility of the university to replicate services that already exist in the community.
- b) The University has a responsibility to staff to provide specialised support services and to appoint professionals that are able to promote mental health, as well as support staff that have mental health problems where the capacity exists or is available.
- c) Where a staff discloses a mental health problem or difficulty to the university, the university has a responsibility to provide the staff with reasonable accommodation in order to prevent the staff from being unduly disadvantaged by this difficulty.
- d) The University will encourage, support and monitor all mental health initiatives by staff where possible.

### 6.2 The Human Resources Division

- a) Assist the Wellness Service Provider in the positioning of the program within the institution in order to optimize its benefit.
- b) Empower staff to recognize mental health issues by ensuring continued promotion and awareness of the mental health in the workplace Program within the University – in close collaboration with the Wellness Service Provider.
- c) Coordinate training of supervisors and managers in the identification, management and referral of employees affected by mental health conditions. This will include topical talks for employees.
- d) The Human Resources will market the Employee Wellness Program (EWP) services and will be responsible, in collaboration with the Wellness Service Provider, for the positioning of the mental health program in the University.
- e) The EWP service provider will be responsible for interventions to support employees and assist them in dealing with mental health related problems. These interventions will include telephone counselling, face-to-face counselling, legal advice and financial advice.

- f) The EWP service provider will consult with the University to mitigate potential risks based on observed trends.

### **6.3 The Line Manager**

- a) Managers/Supervisors are responsible for the effective implementation of the Mental Health policy and will provide an enabling environment and support to all employees.
- b) Managers/Supervisors should be able to recognize the symptoms and functional impact of mental health related problems in the workplace.
- c) Managers are required to be consistent and treat all employees fairly.
- d) Managers are not expected to attempt to diagnose mental health conditions of the employee or offer a personal opinion. Instead, managers are required to refer the employee to the appropriate resources such as the EWP.
- e) Managers are encouraged to provide follow-up and support to employees upon return to work after an absence.
- f) Managers may not request the employee to divulge the nature of the problem when requesting leave or time off for an appointment with the EWP. If necessary, the employee can provide verification of attendance through the EWP.
- g) Managers are required to maintain a strict level of confidentiality with all cases.

### **6.4 The Employee**

- a) All employees are encouraged to understand this policy and seek clarification from management where required.
- b) Employees are encouraged to support and contribute to the University's aim of providing a mentally healthy and supportive environment for all workers.
- c) It is the responsibility of the employee to maintain satisfactory job performance. In the event that mental health related problems cause deterioration of work performance, the employee has a responsibility to obtain the necessary help to bring job performance up to an acceptable level.
- d) It is the responsibility of the employee to take reasonable care of their own mental health and wellbeing, including physical health.
- e) It is the responsibility of the employee take reasonable care that their actions do not affect the health and safety of other people in the workplace.

## **7. MONITORING AND EVALUATION**

The effectiveness of the mental health program shall be continually monitored and evaluated by the University's custodian/team and/or wellness committee. This will be done through quarterly and annual utilization reports.

**8. GOVERNANCE**

The governance in respect of support for staff with mental health difficulties is undertaken by the Human Resources Division.

**9. POLICY REVIEW**

Regular review of the policy is conducted in accordance with the approved University Policy on Policy Development. The process takes place in consultation with the relevant quality assurance structures at Faculty and Departmental levels, as well as by the Wellness Committee, under the auspices of the official custodian of this policy, namely the Director for Employment Relations and Wellness.

**APPROVED BY MEC ON 19 JANUARY 2021**